



INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE,

By JOHN ANGUS.

AMONG the many instructive and en-
dearing characters, under which our
Lord Jesus is described in the holy
scriptures, that of the shepherd of the sheep is
one, and a very important one too; a cha-
racter, expressive of the most amiable condescen-
sion, tender care, and gracious love, and which,
while it reflects the highest honour upon him,
speaks the greatest encouragement to us. Nor
is the divine saviour only represented under
the character of a shepherd; but to intimate
and express his peculiar and transcendent excel-
lency as such, he is further stiled, by way of
distinction and eminence, “the great,” “the
“chief,” and “the good shepherd^a”; and never
were epithets more properly, or justly applied
than these; for he, to whom they are given, is
the shepherd of all the sheep, the supream uni-
versal pastor, and a pastor, whose love to, and
care of the whole flock, infinitely exceed all our
present conceptions.

“All we” of the human race, had “like sheep
“gone astray, we had turned every one to his
“own way^b”; and if we had been left to our-

^a Heb. xiii. 20. 1 Pet. v. 4. John x. 11.

^b Isa. liii. 6.

selves, we should all have continued wanderers from God, and fallen at last into that horrible pit of extremest misery, and utter ruin, out of which there is no redemption. But he who is the “father of mercies,” and “the God of all grace,” had compassion on us; in these our sinful and dangerous wanderings, and to save us from the threatened destruction, and bring us back again to God; with these benevolent views he raised up, and “set over us one shepherd, even David his servant,” his only begotten and well beloved son, “the root and the offspring of David,” into whose hands he committed his chosen and well beloved flock; and “on him” whom he thus appointed to be our shepherd, “the Lord laid the iniquity of us all,” ordained him to be our substitute and sacrifice; and required that he should pay down his life and blood, a ransom for the flock over which he was to preside in the quality of a shepherd.

Nor to this, which was required of him, tho’ it was exceeding arduous, debasing, and painful, did he, who was “God’s Fellow,” refuse his consent; on the contrary, he agreed to it, with the utmost readiness and joy, making this cheerful and obedient reply, “Lo! I come, I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart;” and when he heard the Lord of Hosts say to his avenging justice, “Awake, O sword! against my shepherd; and smite the shepherd,” he fell prostrate before him, and cried, “Father, not my will, but thine be done,” and then, with his own

^c 2 Cor. i. 3.

^d 1. Pet. v. 10.

^e Ezek. xxxiv. 23.

^f Rev. xxii. 16.

^g Mat. xiii. 6.

^h Zech. xiii. 7.

ⁱ Psa. xl. 7, 8.

^k Zech. xiii. 7.

^l Luke xxii 42.

free consent, as well as by the father's appointment, his body was "wounded for our transgressions," "and his soul made an offering for our sins^m." "Thus did the good shepherd give "his life for the sheepⁿ," and thus "did he pursue the flock with his own blood^o;" for "we were not redeemed with such corruptible things "as silver and gold, but with the precious blood "of Christ^p." As by "thus loving us, and giving himself for us^q," he has approved himself to be indeed the good shepherd, a shepherd eminently and superlatively good; for never was any love, or grace like this, which is a "love "that passeth knowledge," and grace, which has "a breadth, length, depth, and height^r," which can never be measured or fathomed; and as the blood which he shed, was "the blood of "God^s, and blood which confirmed and ratified the new covenant; so, after he had laid down his life, he was, through the merit and virtue of this blood, raised from the dead, and solemnly invested with the character and office of the great shepherd of the sheep, for "the God "of peace brought again from the dead our "Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, "through the blood of the everlasting covenant^t."

Nor did the Lord Jesus only sustain this sublime character, the shepherd of the sheep, but, with a condescension and care, tenderness and fidelity, truly gracious and divine, he executes the duty annexed to it, in all its several important branches: thus, while the sheep are going astray, and when the set time to favour them

^m Isa. liii. 5, 10.

ⁿ John x. 11.

^o Acts xx. 28.

^p 1 Pet. ii. 18, 19.

^q Gal. ii. 20.

^r Epp. iii. 18, 19.

^s Acts xx. 28.

^t Heb. xiii. 20.

is come, by his word and spirit, he seeks after them, finds them out, causes them to hear and obey his voice, and brings them into his fold; the highly favoured flock thus happily brought home, "he feeds like a shepherd, gathering the lambs with his arm, carrying them in his bosom, and gently leading those that are with young", "leading them beside the still water, and making them to lie down in green, and rich, pasture"; and, while the sheep hear his voice, and follow him, he knows them, and gives unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand." And, in consequence of this, how safe and happy is the flock! how gracious and faithful the shepherd!

Neither does this great and good shepherd only thus tend and feed the flock himself, but, as a further expression of his affectionate regard, he provides and appoints over it under-shepherds, "giving pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ"; to these, the under-shepherds, he solemnly gives it in charge, "to take heed to themselves, and to all the flock, over which they are made overseers, and to feed his church, which he has purchased with his own blood"; and this he enjoins them to do as the best evidence and proof which they can exhibit of their love to him: thus, when he reinstated a backsliding apostle in his office, which he had forfeited by a thrice repeated and very aggravated denial of him, he thrice asked him, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

^u Isa. xl. 11.

^v Psal. xxiii. 2.

^x John x. 27, 28.

^y Eph. iv. 11, 12.

^z Acts xx. 28.

And upon thrice receiving from him this answer, "Lord thou knowest that I love thee," He thrice replied, "Feed my lambs, feed my "sheep". And to encourage and animate the under-shepherds to a diligent, zealous and faithful discharge of this their duty, he promises to bestow upon them, "when the chief shepherd "of the sheep shall appear, a crown of glory "which fadeth not away". How strong an incentive! how transporting a prospect is this!

The under-shepherds, who are thus appointed, and encouraged to feed the flock, are frail, mortal men, men, "whose days upon earth are "only as a shadow", and who, like to the priests under the law, are "not suffered to "continue by reason of death"; for "the treasure of the gospel is put into earthen vessels, "that the excellency of the power may be of "God, and not of us": but he, who is the chief shepherd, though "once he was dead, yet "now he is alive again, and behold! he lives "for evermore"; and as on him is the care of all the churches, and as with him is "the residue of the spirit", so while, time after time, he removes and calls home, by death, one generation of the under-shepherds, he raises up another, to succeed them in their office and work; and thus he maintains, in his churches, a constant succession of ministering servants.

This gracious care of the good shepherd, you, the flock of God in this place, are now happily experiencing. A little while ago, by the death of your late worthy pastor, who, for the space of

John xxi. 15, 16, 17.

1 Pet. v. 4.

Job viii 9.

Heb. vii. 23.

2 Cor. iv. 7.

Rev. i. 18.

Malachi ii. 15.

thirty-

thirty-three years, "fed you according to the
 "integrity of his heart," you were left as
 sheep without a shepherd; and how dark and
 threatening was then the prospect! but, in the
 midst of that darkness, light has arisen unto you.
 In answer to your prayers and tears, the good
 shepherd has provided for, and is this day fix-
 ing amongst you another under-shepherd, one
 who is well qualified for the sacred and impor-
 tant office, and who, we doubt not, will ap-
 prove himself amongst you, "a pastor accor-
 ding to God's own heart," by diligently and
 faithfully "feeding you with knowledge and
 "understanding."

On this solemn and joyful occasion, you have
 invited the pastors and messengers of the neigh-
 bouring churches, to be witnesses of your faith
 and order, in choosing and setting apart to the
 pastoral office amongst you, our reverend and
 worthy Brother; and, that the end of our pre-
 sent meeting may be properly answered, permit
 me to propose to you, and to him, a few que-
 stions, which it is customary to ask on such
 occasions as this.

And in the first place, let me desire you, the
 members of this church, to give us, by one of
 your number, an account of the steps you have
 taken towards the settlement which you are now
 going to complete.

*Which was accordingly done, by a person depu-
 tied by the church.*

Let me next desire you, the members of this
 church, publickly to avow, or recognize the

^a Psal. lxxviii. 72.

¹ Jer. iii. 15.

call, which you have given our Brother, to the pastoral office amongst you, by lifting up your hands.

Which was immediately done.

Let me now, Reverend Sir, request you to favour me with a relation of the light in which the call of this church appeared to you, and of your motives for accepting it.

Which Mr. Fell accordingly did.

Be pleased, Sir, in the next place, to testify your acceptance of the call of this church, to the pastoral office amongst them.

Which Mr. Fell did likewise.

Among other necessary qualifications, "he that desireth the office of a Bishop," must "be apt to teach^k." An aptness to teach evidently presupposes an intimate acquaintance with, and a cordial belief of, the great and distinguishing doctrines of divine revelation: be pleased then, Sir, to favour me with a free and open confession of your faith, with regard to these sacred and interesting truths.

Here Mr. Fell's Confession, which follows this account, was delivered by him.

I heartily thank you, dear Sir, for this good confession, made in the presence of many witnesses. And now, may "grace, mercy, and peace, from God our father, and Jesus Christ our Lord, be with you^l!" "May your bow abide in strength, and your hands be made

^k 1 Tim. iii. 1, 2.

^l 1 Tim. i. 2.

“strong, by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob^m!” For many, for very many years, may “you preach the gospel” in this place, and discharge all the duties of the pastoral office, “with the holy ghost sent down from heavenⁿ!” In consequence of that, may all your labours in the Lord, be crowned with the greatest and happiest success! Under your ministrations, may this church of the living God be abundantly multiplied and edified! Here may many sons and daughters be born unto God, added to this Christian society, and trained up in “a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light^o!” May they be “your joy” and comfort now, and “your crown of rejoicing in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming^p!” Go forth, my dear Brother, in the name and strength of your divine master. He says, “Lo! I am with you always^q,” and adds, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life^r.”

^m Gen. xlix. 24.
^p 1 Thess. ii. 19.

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 12.
^q Matt. xxviii. 20.

^o Col. i. 12.
^r Rev. ii. 10.

A
C O N F E S S I O N
O F
F A I T H,
B Y
J O H N F E L L.

AS what you now request, Sir, is in itself highly reasonable, and relates to the basis of my future ministry, I, with great readiness of mind, make the following declaration of my faith, concerning the most capital and important doctrines of religion.

I believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the inspired and holy word of God; wherein he hath been pleased to reveal the glories of his own nature, and to make known the gracious purposes of his mercy and goodness, with respect to men.

From these sacred oracles I understand, that he who made the heavens and the earth, and all things therein, is a spirit eternal, infinite, and unchangeable in his being and perfections; and that he is the only living and true God.

I believe, that the holy and blessed God, "according to the counsel of his own will," created all things which have life and being, by the word of his power; for he spake, and the

^a Ephes. i. 11.

globe existed, he commanded, and its preservation was sure.

I am persuaded that no event, in the vast extent of nature, either great or small, either in this or any other world, can possibly happen without his foreknowledge, or without his determination concerning its issue; for he sustaineth every creature, and "his kingdom ruleth over all^b."

I believe that God, from the greatness of his wisdom and power, can only do that which is wise and holy, and just;—that this is the perfection and glory of his nature;—and that, from the absolute dependence which every creature must have, in all things, upon his will and pleasure, there can be no instance of moral goodness in the universe, without his agency and favour; for he is the fountain of life, of knowledge, of virtue, of purity, and of happiness.

I make no doubt that God "made man," at first "upright^c," free from every natural and moral defect, and in the exercise of "righteousness and true holiness^d;" bearing the glorious image of his divine original, and not only able, but also delighting to obey his maker, and to enjoy his holy presence.

I am convinced that God entered into a covenant with man, in his first, in his innocent and happy state, as the natural and federal head of all his future offspring;—that, as the test of his obedience, he was forbidden to eat of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil^e," upon pain of death; and that there was a promise of life and happiness, both to himself and to his

^b Psal. ciii. 19.

^c Eccles. vii. 29.

^d Eph. iv. 24.

^e Gen. ii. 16, 17.

posterity, implied in that agreement : but, that our first parents fell from that holy estate wherein they were created, by eating the forbidden fruit.

I believe, therefore,——that the whole world of mankind are involved in the guilt, and in the other consequences of Adam's first transgression ; that it cannot be otherwise in the present constitution of things ; that, from his sin, we are deprived of original righteousness, and our whole nature is become corrupt, which is justly called ORIGINAL SIN, as from thence proceed all the actual transgressions of our lives ; that all men are born into the world under the wrath and curse of God, not only exposed to the various miseries of this life, and under the unavoidable power of death, but also liable to everlasting pains and sorrows in the future world.

I am certain that God hath not left all mankind to perish in their fallen and sinful estate ; but that, in his great power, in his exalted goodness, and infinite knowledge, whereby he surveys all things from everlasting, he hath chosen to himself a great multitude of our race, to be redeemed, renewed, and raised to eternal life and blessedness ; and that, out of his meer good pleasure, he did, from all eternity, enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver his chosen people from sin and misery, that they might be brought into a never ending state of perfect happiness, by a Redeemer.

I believe that none of mankind are now “ saved,” or even “ called ” to the hope of life and glory, “ according to their works,” or merits ; “ but ” only, “ according to God's own pur-
C 2 “ pose

“ pose and grace, which was given them in
 “ Christ Jesus, before the world began¹.”

I am persuaded that “ there are three who
 “ bear record in heaven,” who are respective-
 ly engaged in the work of man’s redemption,
 and “ from whom comes every good and every
 “ perfect gift²,” “ the Father, the Word, and
 “ Holy Ghost³ ;” that these three persons, tho’
 distinct from each other, are yet the One living
 and true God; that the Father is neither the
 Son, nor the Holy Ghost ; that the Son is nei-
 ther the Father, nor the Holy Ghost ; and that
 the Holy Ghost is neither the Father nor the
 Son ; and that they mutually exist by and with
 each other, but not separately, being the one
 eternal and undivided cause of all being, life,
 knowledge, and happiness. In this light I un-
 derstand the sacred scriptures, as teaching con-
 cerning the incomprehensible nature of the holy
 and blessed God ; but the manner in which
 these things are, does not appear to be a sub-
 ject of divine Revelation, and therefore, in
 the present state, is not a proper object for our
 faith.

I believe that “ the word was made flesh¹,”
 —that he took upon him our nature and ta-
 bernacled with men, that he might redeem
 and save from among our lost race, such as
 were given to him of the father, and that he
 might present unto God an holy church with-
 out blemish, and without spot ; that the name
 Son of God, in the New Testament, always com-
 prehends the Deity of Christ, and that the term,
 Son of man, denotes his humanity : so that Je-

¹ 2 Tim. i. 9.

² John i. 14.

³ James i. 17.

¹ John v. 7.

Jesus Christ the only Mediator between God and men, is truly God, and truly man, united in the same person.

It is an article of my faith, that Christ was born into the world in our weak nature, with all its sinless infirmities ; that he was " made " under the " same " law ^k, " which we have violated ; that he yielded a full and complete obedience to all its commands, that he endured the dreadful punishment which was due to our sins, that he laid down his life a ransom for his own people, that " he bore their sins in his own " body on the tree ^l, " that he tasted all the bitterness of death, when he offered himself a sacrifice without spot unto God ; that he was buried ; that in all these things he acted and suffered in the room and stead of his people, as their head and " surety ^m ; " that having made an expiation for their sins, he rose again from the dead on the third day, in " the power of an endless " life ", and then " sat down on the right hand " of the MAJESTY on high ^o ; " and that thro' these great and solemn transactions, all the attributes of God are united and revealed in their glory, for the redemption and happiness of man, so that Jesus Christ is the only " name " given under heaven among men whereby we " can be saved ^p."

I believe that the ground of a sinner's hope before God, is the perfect work and atoning death of Christ alone, as revealed in the gospel, and as believed in the heart ; that justifying faith is such a belief in the righteousness and death of Jesus Christ, for the pardon

^k Gal. iv. 4.

ⁿ Heb. vii. 16.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 24.

^o Heb. i. 3.

^m Heb. vii. 22.

^p Acts iv. 12.

of all sins, and for acceptance with God, as enables the soul to receive him^a with confidence and joy, and to rest upon him alone for all grace and salvation, realizing those great blessings in the mind, as they respect the state and circumstances of the whole man; that this grace which is believed becomes in the soul a principle of life, peace, holiness and spiritual joy; that true faith is wrought in the mind by the spirit of God, through whose energy alone the truths of the gospel are made to reach the heart and conscience of man; and that all Christians are born again, "being in Christ, they are new creatures".

It appears to me, that there is a change in the state, temper and conduct of these persons; that whereas before, they were obnoxious to everlasting punishment, now their sins are forgiven, and their persons accepted; that the spirit of God, through the word of the gospel, begins in their souls, the same holy and divine life which was sinless and perfect in the human nature of Christ, and which, in due time, will be complete in them; that this life and state is in all things directly opposite to the natural life and condemned state of man; that as in the one, they have lost the image of God, and "have borne the image of the earthy", so in the other, they are again restored to the divine likeness, and "bear the image of Christ, the Lord from heaven"; that, in the participation of this life, men become the sons of God, and are one with the Lord Jesus, "being born again, not of blood, nor of the will of the

^a John i. 12.
48, 49.

^r 2 Cor. v. 17.

^s 1 Cor. xv. 47,

"flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God¹," and are therefore justly said, in the holy scriptures, to be "created in Christ Jesus unto good works²."

I apprehend that all true Christians are sanctified and made holy, by the spirit of grace, thro' the word of the gospel, having been chosen of God for this purpose; that as "without holiness no man can see the Lord³," so without "the fruits of righteousness⁴" and holy obedience to the word of God, no man can be justly deemed a Christian: because these are the proper "fruits of the spirit of Christ⁵," they must always spring up, and gradually mature, wherever there is a divine life, so that, by degrees, they will subdue the power, and at last extirpate the very being of sin from the renewed soul: pride, envy, selfishness, dissimulation, hatred and contention, being as foreign from the Christian name, as drunkenness, theft, fornication and adultery.

I believe, that wherever "God hath begun a good work, he will perform it until the day of Christ⁶;" that he forsaketh not his saints; and although sin will cleave to their nature, during the present life, yet they shall be preserved from final apostacy, that none of them shall ever perish, but "the only wise God, their Saviour, will keep them from falling, and present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy⁷."

I am persuaded that all those for whom Christ died, and no other, shall, in due time, and in proper order, be called to the saving know-

¹ John i. 13.

² Philipp. i. 11.

³ Jude ver. 24, 25.

⁴ Eph. ii. 10.

⁵ Gal. v. 22.

⁶ Heb. xii. 14.

⁷ Philipp. i. 6.

ledge of his name and gospel : since men are not made partakers of a divine nature, and of immortal blessings by chance, and whatever God doth, must be according to his infinitely wise and righteous counsel, to think otherwise, seems to be a dishonour to the fountain of wisdom and goodness, and to take away all solid ground of hope from every rational mind ; for if God is not immutable and fixed in the communication of blessedness, who then can trust in his name ?

I am sensible that the gospel is to be “ preached to every creature^b,” that “ the children of “ God, who are scattered abroad “ among all nations, may be gathered from the world into separate societies, according to the institution of Christ ; the members of which do by consent unite and acknowledge the Lord Jesus, as their only head and lawgiver.

I consider a church of Christ, thus formed, as having a right, within itself, to chuse its own officers, under the guidance of his spirit, and to receive and exclude members, according to the rules of his gospel, and view such a society as, in matters of faith and religious worship, subject to no jurisdiction under heaven.

I believe that Christ hath instituted in his church, “ Pastors,” who are also called Elders or Bishops, together with “ Teachers, for the perfecting the saints, for the work of the ministry, “ for the edifying of the body of Christ^d ; ” and likewise “ Deacons^e,” for the proper order of his house, and for the advantage of the saints ; that no other abiding officers are mentioned in

^b Mark xvi. 15. ^c John xi. 52. ^d Eph. iv. 11, 12.
^e Acts vi. 1, &c.

the New Testament ; that it is the duty of a pastor to preach the word, and to administer the sacred ordinances of the gospel, as “ the helper of his brethren’s faith and joy¹ ; ” and that Baptism and the Lord’s supper were appointed by Christ, for the perpetual observance of all his churches.

I apprehend that baptism is to be administered in the use of water ; that sprinkling or pouring the element on the person baptised, is the true scriptural method of performing this ordinance ; that it can never be proved, that either our Lord, or any of John’s disciples, were baptised by immersion ; that whatever might have been the practice of John the baptist, in this respect, yet his example can be no fixed rule for us, since the apostles, after they had received power from heaven to introduce the gospel state, re-baptised those who had been before baptised by John, which clearly proves that his baptism was not to be the model of ours under the Christian dispensation ; and, after our Lord’s resurrection, baptism is always spoken of in such language and connection, as naturally excludes all thoughts of immersion. I believe also that the proper subjects of this ordinance are not only those who profess their faith in Christ, but also their infant seed ; that all true Christians, therefore, ought to have their infant children “ baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost² ; ” and that such children have a divine right to this sacred privilege, for the following reasons :

Because, 1st, Every individual of mankind is born into the world under the guilt and power

¹ 2 Cor. i. 24. ² Matth. xxviii. 19.

of sin, and from their birth need forgiveness and the renewing grace of God. Infants suffer pain, and “ death, which is the wages of sin ; ” this shews that they need “ the gift of God, ^{et}ich “ is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our “ Lord ^h ” : and they to whom sin is imputed, are, without doubt, the capable and proper subjects of imputed righteousness.

Because, 2dly, All men justly acknowledge, that infants, as well as adult persons, are capable of glory and happiness in a future state, for which reason infants repeatedly obtained the notice and blessing of Christ, “ who rebuked “ those which forbad ” their parents to introduce babes and sucklings, affirming, that “ of “ such is the kingdom of God ^l ”.

Because, 3dly, The scriptures affirm, that the children of those who believe are “ holy ^k , ” but not the children of Infidels.

Because 4thly, Infants under the Jewish dispensation, were the subjects of that ordinance which God himself instituted as a “ SEAL OF “ THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS BY FAITH ^l . ” Now, persons of full age, are not capable of any thing more, nor do they ever receive any thing beyond the blessings of that righteousness ; in every instance, therefore, wherein the gospel was preached to the Patriarchs of old, their infant children were not only intitled to, but actually enjoy’d the seal and pledge of the glorious gospel : who then shall now begin to exclude them from this sacred privilege, since the fulness of all that grace has been so long revealed, in which the infant children of Christians, are said

^h Rom. vi. 23. ^l Matth. xix. 13, 14, 15. Mark x. 13 — 16. Luke xviii. 15, 16. ^k 1 Cor. vii. 14.

^l Rom. iv. 11.

to be " holy" in as exprefs language as ever were the feed of Abraham?

And becaufe, 5thly, Infant baptifm hath been the invariable practice of the church of Chrift, from the beginning to this day, nor was ever an exception heard of till modern times.

I believe that it is the indifpenfible duty of every true Chriftian to unite himfelf to fome church of Chrift, in all the institutions of his word, and to commemorate with the people of God, the fufferings and death of his faviour in the Lord's fupper.

Finally, I believe that the fouls of all the faithful, upon their feparation from the body, are immediately with Chrift in Heaven, and enjoy a finlefs ftate of activity and bleffednefs; that there fhall be a refurrection of the bodies, firft of the juft and then of the unjuft; and that " God hath appointed a Day in which he will " judge the world in righteoufnefs, by that man " whom he hath ordained ^m," when the wicked fhall receive their final fentence, and be banifhed from the prefence of God into everlafting punifhment; but when the righteous fhall obtain the fulnefs of redemption, and be introduced into the moft exalted and never-ending ftate of glory and happinefs. *Amen.*

^m Acts xvii. 31.

CHURCH THOMAS DAVIDSON

Reverend and Dear Brethren,
 YOU have this day given up your right to the
 record, and his honorable name in the
 work of the gospel, to which you have been
 solemnly set apart by your brethren in the
 ministry here present, to whom I think this right
 properly belongs; you have also given up your
 right to the service of this church of God, by
 resigning your resignation to the
 ecclesiastical office among them; to that there
 is now a great and very important relation fixed
 between you and the church, the consequences of
 which will reach to and be felt by you
 and them in the eternal world. When this is
 solemnly considered, as for the transactions of this
 day, in which we have been, and are now en-
 gaged, in a very awful and striking point of

It is usual on such occasions as this, and
 indeed highly proper, for one to give a solemn
 charge to the person invested with the ministerial
 character and pastoral office, and as you have
 in and the church assembling in this place, have
 laid their part of the solemn work of the day
 upon me, the minister and their authority of

THE
CHARGE

BY

THOMAS DAVIDSON.

REVEREND AND DEAR BROTHER,

YOU have this day given up yourself to the Lord, and his honourable service in the work of the gospel, to which you have been solemnly set apart, by your brethren in the ministry here present, to whom I think this most properly belongs: you have also given up yourself to the service of this church of his, by publicly testifying your acceptance of their call to the pastoral office among them; so that there is now a near and very important relation fixed between you and them, the consequences of which will reach to, and be felt both by you and them, in the eternal world. When this is duly considered, it sets the transactions of this day, in which we have been, and are now engaged, in a very awful and striking point of view.

It is usual on such occasions as this, and indeed highly proper, for one to give a solemn Charge to the person invested with the ministerial character and pastoral office, and as you, dear sir, and the church assembling in this place, have laid that part of the solemn work of this day upon me, the meanest and most unworthy of the

the Lord's servants, I shall, at your desire and their's, humbly attempt it; and I shall found what I shall offer to your serious consideration on this occasion, on that charge which the apostle Paul gave to Timothy in his second

EPISTLE, chap. ii. ver. 15.

STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH.

All the parts of the holy ministry are awful and important, which ever way they are viewed, and therefore deserve the closest consideration; hence the apostle introduced his exhortation here, with the word rendered "study", which implies diligence, solicitude, and carefulness, as about a thing of the greatest moment and consequence as to the issue of it. Deep and serious thinking is the indispensable duty of all who engage in the work of the ministry, concerning its nature, tendency, and effects, both with respect to themselves, and those whom it more immediately concerns in the exercise of it; therefore I would begin my address to you, my dear brother, by repeating the words of the apostle in the text, STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH.

The service you are now engaging in is his service, the service of the Lord Jesus Christ; you are now taking him for your lord and master, and in the managing of your work, you are to look carefully into his word, to see what instructions he gives his servants there, concerning the way in which that work is to be carried on, so as that the great ends of it may

be answered : unless this is duly adverted to, and complied with, nothing we do can be accepted of him. Well then, brother, I would in the FIRST place say, " Study to shew yourself " approved unto God," as a Christian, both with respect to the truth and reality of religion in the heart, which no eye can see but his, and in that part of it also, which comes under the observation of men, which is a testimony and proof both to them and ourselves, that our religion is true and genuine, without any thing of allowed hypocrisy and guile. Study then, I say, to approve yourself unto God as a CHRISTIAN, by narrowly examining yourself, as in his sight, whether you have believed the gospel to the saving of your own soul ; for this is the root, the foundation, the ground-work of all true religion, without it there can be none.

This is a point we cannot be too solicitous about ; for it is the same with what the apostle calls " a giving diligence to make our calling " and election sure^a." For a man to be employed in preaching that gospel, which he himself has not believed, is dreadful beyond what can be described ; for he carries about with him the sentence of his own condemnation, which, in the course of preaching, he must frequently declare, " He that believeth not shall be damned^b."

Ministers are not exempted from that commandment, " Examine yourselves, whether ye " be in the faith^c." Much depends on this, both as to their own inward peace, and the success of their ministry too. I may venture to say, there are none in the world in greater danger of self-deceit than ministers. Their work and office lay

^a 2 Pet. i. 10.

^b Mark xvi. 16.

^c 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

them under a necessity, if they have any regard to their character, and sacred function, to observe at least an outwardly decent and blameless walk, by keeping at a more than ordinary distance from those gross sins which even the world call shameful, and yet this may be nothing more than a casual restraint laid upon sin: the stated and regular return of the duties belonging to their office, both of a public and private nature, lays them under a necessity of being often engaged in the exercise of gifts; and when these are more than common, and such as excite applause and commendation from men, how easy is it for self-deceit to insinuate itself into our minds, so as to make us mistake gifts for grace! and a mistake of that kind, unless it be discovered and rectified, cannot fail to have fatal effects on them who make it.

That is an awful word that is spoken concerning the angel or minister of the church of Sardis; "I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest and art dead." Many things may concur to make this the case. Men may be possessed of surprising natural abilities, in respect of wisdom, prudence, and a quick apprehension of things; to these may be added great gifts, such as elocution, an ability to set things in an advantageous and taking point of view; so soft and pleasing an address, as is apt to raise the passions, and carry them into a kind of captivity; such a measure of human learning as serves to correct the gifts of nature, to guard them against excess, and to keep them so within the strict precepts of the schools, as to form what is called a complete orator; yea, what

shall I say farther ! besides all these, there may be such knowledge of the word of God, in the letter of it, as enables to express divine truths either in prayer or preaching, in a manner peculiarly taking even to serious Christians : and yet with all these gifts there may be nothing either of the reality or exercise of grace. The gifts may be so shining and conspicuous as to give a man a name to live among men, while yet he is dead before God ; with whom the least measure of true saving grace, and genuine sincerity of heart flowing from it, far exceeds the greatest measure of natural and acquired abilities to be found among men. I would, therefore, say, O brother, there is great need to be enabled by divine teaching, to distinguish between even the free and ready exercise of spiritual gifts, and the real assistance of the holy spirit, in all our ministrations of one kind or another, that we may not make a mistake in so material a point as this. I would put myself in remembrance of this, while at the same time I thus recommend it to you ; for it needs to be impressed daily on all our minds, so as to dwell with such sanctified improvement there, as to fill us with humility and holy fear. If such an one as the great apostle Paul could say, “ I keep under my body, “ and bring it into subjection, lest, that by any “ means, when I have preached the gospel to “ others, I myself should be a cast-away,” how much more may such as we say so !

But not to insist any longer on this, I would say further, study to approve yourself unto God, as a Christian, in the whole of your deportment and walk before the world. “ Holiness becom-

“eth the house of the Lord for ever^a,” this is an eternal and self evident truth. One considerable part of the costly and beautiful dress of the High Priest, under the law, was the crown of gold which surrounded the mitre, on the forefront of which was engraven “HOLINESS TO THE LORD^b,” which intimates still to us, and is a part of the improvement we should make of it, that holiness, universal holiness, should conspicuously shine forth, and be visible in all those who belong to the house of the Lord, and minister in holy things there.

It has been observed by some, and justly, “that it is not with ministers as with men of other employments, who may be good physicians, good lawyers, good soldiers, good statesmen, though otherwise but very indifferent sort of men, yea they may be so, and yet very wicked and profane men; but the minister who disgraces his profession and office, by an unsuitable and unholy life, let his other qualifications be what they will, of all creatures, next to Satan himself, serves the interest of hell most; in regard so many wretched souls are in danger of falling to their destruction, by the bad example he sets them.” It is a dreadful part of the character of Eli’s sons, though perhaps they were punctual enough in their service about the sanctuary, “that they knew not the Lord,” and from them went forth lewdness into all the land, and their profaneness “made the offerings of the Lord to be abhorred.” O my dear brother, what need have we to beware of every thing that so much

^a Psal. xciii. 5.

^b Exod. xxviii. 36, 37, 38, compared with chap. xxxix. 30, 31.

^c 1 Sam. ii.

as borders on this, or has a tendency to lay a stumbling block in the way of unwary souls, over which they may fall to their eternal ruin ! If any do so, the blood of such souls will be required at their hands.

It is true, that part of holiness, and of our walk as Christians I am now speaking of, may be seen and judged of by men, and it is necessary it should be so, according to our Lord's express commandment, " Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your father who is in heaven^d ; " but notwithstanding this, what respects our deportment before men, must be performed as in the sight of God, who is the principal party we have to do with, in this, as well as in that part of our religion that no eye sees but his own ; otherwise all we do is no better, and will be accounted no better than splendid hypocrisy : all must be performed as in his sight, and in obedience to his word, " not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts^e."

Behave as we will indeed, it is not to be expected that we can go through life without censure and blame of one kind or another ; for even innocence itself will not protect one from this, in an ill-natured world : and when this is the case with us, there is one way in which we may turn the unjust censures of men to our own advantage, by endeavouring, through grace, to live and be, the very reverse of what they falsely say of us ; this is the best, the most convincing, and the most lasting confutation they can meet with. A holy, tender, uniform, circumspect walk, always speaks for itself, and

^d Matth. v. 16.

^e 1 Theff. ii. 4.

leaves a testimony in the consciences even of the worst of men, who neither love it, nor care to imitate it.

There should be nothing dubious in a minister's walk or conduct, nothing that needs an elaborate apology ; for where that is the case, it always carries something that is suspicious, and seldom, if ever, fails to hide something that is blameworthy under it. O ! how comfortable is it, when we can, with some measure of truth, adopt the words of the apostle, and say, " Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, " that in simplicity, and godly sincerity, not with " fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have " had our conversation in the world ¹ ! " In what forcible and endearing language does he appeal both to God and men, when he says, " Ye are " witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly, " and unblameably we behaved ourselves among " you that believe ² . " This, my dear brother, is to exemplify our doctrine, and carries conviction to the hearts of our hearers, when they see the influence it has upon our own hearts. " A holy " life, as one well expresses it, is the most persuasive sermon, expressed too in a language " which men of all nations equally understand. " It even explains what other sermons mean, instead of needing to be explained by them. " Men will see more beauty in holiness thus set " before them in the whole of our walk and " conversation, than in the most rhetorical description we can give of it in words ; and then " they lose no time, for they see it at once. In " this way we may preach without ceasing, by " holding forth the word of life continually,

¹ 2 Cor. i. 12.

² 1 Thess. ii. 10.

“and so exhibit the religion of Christ, that in our practice, all who behold us may have an easy opportunity of reading his laws every day.” How forcible is this way of teaching! How adorning to the doctrine of God our Saviour! This is to approve ourselves unto God as Christians: and truly it is not only our duty but our life; for it has such a happy influence on the inward frame of our hearts, as to make all the parts of our publick work easy and delightful. Well then, brother, “be thou an example of the believers, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity^a”. But not to insist any more on this.

SECONDLY, “Study to shew yourself approved unto God,” as a minister. I doubt not, brother, but you are able to make out your call to the ministry, so as to satisfy your own mind, that you are not running unsent. If the Lord has inclined your heart to the work, if he has enabled you, by his grace, to devote and give up yourself to him in it; if he has made your ends in undertaking it sincere and upright, in having it as your principal aim to glorify him, to advance the spiritual interests of the kingdom of Christ, and promote the salvation of precious souls, without any sinful regard to secular advantages whatsoever; you can desire nothing more to satisfy your own mind, that you are called of him to the work: your having a regular education for the ministry, and having been engaged in preaching the gospel, for some years, to the satisfaction both of ministers and people who have heard you, together with the unanimous call you have had from this church,

^a 1 Tim. iv. 12.

afford abundant satisfaction to others also, that you are indeed called to the work : and therefore all I shall say further on this head shall be comprised in these following things.

1. As a minister, study to approve yourself unto God, in respect of diligence in his work. The words I have chosen as the ground of this exhortation, hold forth the Christian ministry as a work ; ministers are here called " workmen," and ought to be such. The Lord Christ says to his servants, whom he puts into the ministry, as in the parable, " Go work in my vineyard¹." There is no room for loiterers here. The ministry is a work, and a painful laborious work it is, if managed as it ought to be. Ministers have much fallow ground to break up, both with respect to themselves and others. They have not only the work of every returning season, but the work of all seasons at once, on their hands ; seed time and harvest, plowing, sowing, planting, and watering ; and all to be done with the utmost care and assiduity. Time would fail to enlarge here, I shall mention only one part of the minister's work, " labouring in the word and " doctrine^k," for that is the part of a minister's labour that the text has a particular reference to : be diligent, therefore, my dear brother, in this part of your work, " labouring in " the word and doctrine." When you engage in it, bear it upon your mind, that preaching the word is an ordinance of God, for the conversion and edification of precious souls, and that according to the entertainment it meets with, they who hear it from your mouth must be saved or lost for ever. This view of preaching the word

¹ Matth. xxi. 28,

^k 1 Tim. v. 17.

is, alas ! in our day, in a great measure overlooked, if not lost ; hence it is that both on the part of many ministers and hearers, it is considered as a grave, religious kind of amusement, and people come to places of worship, either as custom leads the way, or to gratify their curiosity, and be entertained for an hour. This may be assigned as one reason why the word is so little attended with success at present ; and truly where this evil obtains, and as it obtains, like a moth, it eats out the life of serious godliness, and makes religion to dwindle down to an empty form. O ! brother, beware yourself of, and warn the people of your charge against this prevailing evil ; that in your ministrations they may always meet with what has a tendency rather to reach the heart, and touch the conscience, than to tickle the ear, and please the fancy.

Search the scriptures daily, and dig deep in that precious field, as one who is in quest of an inestimable treasure, not merely as a scholar and a critick, (though that is sometimes very useful, in its own place, when it is done with humility and true judgment) but search them for food and life to your own soul ; that you may be savingly and practically acquainted with the truths contained in them, so as that when you preach them, you may be able to say, “ I speak the things I know, and testify the things I have seen.” You are to employ all the talents and gifts God has bestowed on you, whether natural, gracious, or acquired, in searching into, and seeking to know the mind and will of God in his word, and especially that part of it, which you make the ground of your public mi-

John iii. 11.

ministrations

ministrations from time to time; for it is not sufficient, on such occasions, that a man speaks truth, and what is edifying in its own nature, but it should be the truth of the passage before him; that so the hearers may be led to what, at least, he takes to be the true and genuine meaning of the Holy Spirit.

Excellent to this purpose, and worthy of imitation, is what that great man of God, Dr. Owen, says, in his preface to his exposition of the epistle to the Hebrews, "Careful have I
 "been, as of my life and soul, to bring no pre-
 "judicate sense unto the words, to impose no
 "meaning of my own, or other men's upon
 "them, nor to be imposed on, by the reasonings
 "or the curiosities of any, but went always na-
 "kedly to the word itself, to learn humbly the
 "mind of God in it, and to express it as he
 "should enable me." Be conscientiously dili-
 gent in studying carefully what you deliver in
 public, so as to make it matter of serious and
 close meditation, which is to be accompanied
 with fervent supplications to the God of all
 grace for light and assistance, that you may
 bring forth nothing that is raw, crude, and in-
 digested, but that which is solid, substantial and
 edifying, that which spiritual souls can easily
 take in and relish. In extraordinary cases, the
 servants of Christ may expect extraordinary
 assistance, but in the ordinary course of their
 ministry, to serve God with that which costs them
 nothing, and which they have not weighed in
 their own minds, and compared with the scrip-
 tures of truth, is the highest degree of pre-
 sumption, and may fitly be compared to what
 under the law was called "offering the blind,
 "the lame, the sick, and a corrupt thing to the

"Lord:" But at the same time, I would caution you, dear sir, against satisfying yourself with mere study and no more: labour to have a lively believing sense of the truths you study impress'd on your own mind; endeavour to enter into the spirit of them, that you may speak from the heart to the heart, and as you believe and feel. Without this, a man loses his own part of his labour, I mean, the edification of his own soul. When a minister tastes a divine sweetness in the word he delivers to others, and has a spiritual relish of what he speaks, it makes his labour in the pulpit easy and pleasant. There is something in this, which is altogether inexplicable, and is better felt than can be expressed; the best description I know of it, is in the words of Elihu, "For I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me; behold my belly is as wine which hath no vent, it is ready to burst, like new bottles! I will speak that I may be refreshed." "Such a temper as this (as one well observes) would make us feel to purpose, and then we should speak with propriety and energy; for both order and elocution are the offspring of a warm and an understanding heart. Did we, like Paul, travail as in birth till Christ were formed in the souls of men, our tongue would be like the pen of a ready writer." There is something in this, that is above both study and art, but it may be obtained by faith in prayer, and then indeed, like the apostles, "We should so speak as that many would believe".

2dly, "Study to shew yourself approved unto God," as a minister, in respect of wi-

* Mal. i. 8, 13, 14. " Job xxxii. 18, 19, 20. v. Acts xiv. 1.

dom, I mean that holy spiritual wisdom that cometh from above, and is profitable to direct you in all things relating to your work. There is no power or qualification of the mind, whether natural or gracious, that God has bestowed on us, but is capable of improvement, and we receive such talents with this express charge, "Occupy till I come^x." This is what is called by the apostle in this epistle, "A stirring up of the gift of God that is in us^y" "that our profiting may appear unto all^z." That which I principally aim at, on this head, is that part of wisdom that is necessary to your "Shewing yourself a skilful workman, that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." This, my dear brother, makes constant, daily study and meditation your duty, and not in a slight and superficial manner, but with care, diligence, and exactness, that you may indeed "be skilful in the word of righteousness^a," and may know how to apply it to matters of faith and holy practice, as they occur in the course of your ministry.

"Apollos, though an eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures, and fervent in spirit," needed notwithstanding to have "the way of God expounded to him more perfectly^b." This shews the need that ministers have to be daily employed in searching the scriptures, that they may know more and more of the mind and will of God in them, so that they may be "wise scribes, instructed unto the kingdom of God, that out of that divine treasure they may be able to bring forth things new and old^c." But

^x Luke xix. 13. ^y Chap. i. 6. ^z 1 Tim. iv. 15.
^a Heb. v. 13. ^b Acts xviii. 24—End ^c Mat. xiii. 52.

that which I would particularly touch upon or glance at, is, what the apostle here calls "An ability, rightly to divide the word of truth." This is not an artificial, or what we call an analytical way of dividing the word, which may be done by some who have a talent that way, with great ingenuity, while the main thing to be adverted to, is sadly, if not altogether neglected. That which the apostle means by this phrase, I take to be the same thing that our Lord applies to "the faithful and wise steward, who knows how to give every one his portion of meat in due season."

If all the hearers of the gospel were of one sort, a minister's work this way would be the easier, but it is with the souls of men as with their bodies, a variety of diseases require a variety of remedies, and a wise, skilful phylician too, to know how to adopt what is proper for each. As a nice, thorough knowledge of the structure of the human body, and the different constitutions of persons, and how nature commonly operates in them, and what remedies are suitable to different constitutions, and at different times too; as all this, I say, is necessary to make a skilful and successful phylician, so no less necessary is it for a minister to be well acquainted with the nature of the human soul, how it has been corrupted by sin, and how it is renewed and sanctified by the spirit and grace of God, as both the one and the other are pointed out and taught in the word; without some competent knowledge of this kind, it is impossible one can be what the text calls, "A workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

* Luke xiii. 42.

'Tis only by the study of our own hearts, and the mystery of iniquity hidden there, together with a wise, prudent observation of the different tempers and dispositions of men, that we arrive at any tolerable knowledge of human nature, and are thereby enabled to find out what are the governing passions of them we have to do with, so as to be able to make suitable impressions on them, and to represent truth and duty in such a light as to prevail with them to love and practise it.

Some need to be warned and admonished, when we see them in danger of being led aside from the truth and holiness of the gospel: some need to be put forward, when we see them declining duty from groundless fears and suspicions of any kind: some need to be comforted and encouraged, when we see them groaning under the power of unbelief, and the suggestions of the enemy of souls: some need to be reprov'd, and that sharply, when they turn aside to the error of the wicked, and by unsuitable walking occasion the ways of God to be evil spoken of and blasphemed, and though honest and plain-dealing should always take place on such occasions, yet, if it can be done so as not to exasperate them, this course should be wisely considered and followed: some need to be spoken softly to, yet so as not to be flattered, which is attended with a good deal of difficulty, when we would deal honestly and sincerely with them, and yet would not encourage them in any thing that is blame-worthy in itself, or hurtful to themselves or others.

In a word, as one well observes, " could a
" minister, by a kind of transmigration, lodge
" himself invisibly, for a time, in the bosoms of
" them

“ them he has to do with, and survey the inward make of their souls, could he start up to them in their own image, and speak to them as another self, it would be all little enough to make his addresses successful, and to enable him to become all things to all men”. And I may add, to do it in such a manner as to make it evident to all, that he is indeed a skilful and expert workman, who can turn and apply the word of truth, so as to make it, in a fit, proper and apposite way and manner, meet with all cases, relating to truth and duty, as they occur in providence, and in such a way too, as to convince persons, that they have not him so much to do with, as the God whose word he sets before them.

It is a necessary piece of wisdom also that every minister should study to know when and how to bring forth the truths he handles in the course of his ministry in their season; “ for every thing is beautiful in its season ”. There are some particular times wherein a truth may be what the scripture calls “ a present truth ”, as where it is called in question, and opposed by adversaries, or when people’s practice is directly opposite to it; then we are to “ cry aloud and not to spare ”; it is not time then to express ourselves either in doubtful or smooth words, on the contrary, we ought to be plain and explicit, in publishing and defending it, to the utmost of our power: all which should be done, as with zeal and faithfulness, so with wisdom and prudence; for there is no inconsistency between holy courage, in defending the truth, and what the scripture calls “ the meek-

Eccl. iii. 1. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108. 109. 110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115. 116. 117. 118. 119. 120. 121. 122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128. 129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134. 135. 136. 137. 138. 139. 140. 141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146. 147. 148. 149. 150. 151. 152. 153. 154. 155. 156. 157. 158. 159. 160. 161. 162. 163. 164. 165. 166. 167. 168. 169. 170. 171. 172. 173. 174. 175. 176. 177. 178. 179. 180. 181. 182. 183. 184. 185. 186. 187. 188. 189. 190. 191. 192. 193. 194. 195. 196. 197. 198. 199. 200. 201. 202. 203. 204. 205. 206. 207. 208. 209. 210. 211. 212. 213. 214. 215. 216. 217. 218. 219. 220. 221. 222. 223. 224. 225. 226. 227. 228. 229. 230. 231. 232. 233. 234. 235. 236. 237. 238. 239. 240. 241. 242. 243. 244. 245. 246. 247. 248. 249. 250. 251. 252. 253. 254. 255. 256. 257. 258. 259. 260. 261. 262. 263. 264. 265. 266. 267. 268. 269. 270. 271. 272. 273. 274. 275. 276. 277. 278. 279. 280. 281. 282. 283. 284. 285. 286. 287. 288. 289. 290. 291. 292. 293. 294. 295. 296. 297. 298. 299. 300. 301. 302. 303. 304. 305. 306. 307. 308. 309. 310. 311. 312. 313. 314. 315. 316. 317. 318. 319. 320. 321. 322. 323. 324. 325. 326. 327. 328. 329. 330. 331. 332. 333. 334. 335. 336. 337. 338. 339. 340. 341. 342. 343. 344. 345. 346. 347. 348. 349. 350. 351. 352. 353. 354. 355. 356. 357. 358. 359. 360. 361. 362. 363. 364. 365. 366. 367. 368. 369. 370. 371. 372. 373. 374. 375. 376. 377. 378. 379. 380. 381. 382. 383. 384. 385. 386. 387. 388. 389. 390. 391. 392. 393. 394. 395. 396. 397. 398. 399. 400. 401. 402. 403. 404. 405. 406. 407. 408. 409. 410. 411. 412. 413. 414. 415. 416. 417. 418. 419. 420. 421. 422. 423. 424. 425. 426. 427. 428. 429. 430. 431. 432. 433. 434. 435. 436. 437. 438. 439. 440. 441. 442. 443. 444. 445. 446. 447. 448. 449. 450. 451. 452. 453. 454. 455. 456. 457. 458. 459. 460. 461. 462. 463. 464. 465. 466. 467. 468. 469. 470. 471. 472. 473. 474. 475. 476. 477. 478. 479. 480. 481. 482. 483. 484. 485. 486. 487. 488. 489. 490. 491. 492. 493. 494. 495. 496. 497. 498. 499. 500. 501. 502. 503. 504. 505. 506. 507. 508. 509. 510. 511. 512. 513. 514. 515. 516. 517. 518. 519. 520. 521. 522. 523. 524. 525. 526. 527. 528. 529. 530. 531. 532. 533. 534. 535. 536. 537. 538. 539. 540. 541. 542. 543. 544. 545. 546. 547. 548. 549. 550. 551. 552. 553. 554. 555. 556. 557. 558. 559. 560. 561. 562. 563. 564. 565. 566. 567. 568. 569. 570. 571. 572. 573. 574. 575. 576. 577. 578. 579. 580. 581. 582. 583. 584. 585. 586. 587. 588. 589. 590. 591. 592. 593. 594. 595. 596. 597. 598. 599. 600. 601. 602. 603. 604. 605. 606. 607. 608. 609. 610. 611. 612. 613. 614. 615. 616. 617. 618. 619. 620. 621. 622. 623. 624. 625. 626. 627. 628. 629. 630. 631. 632. 633. 634. 635. 636. 637. 638. 639. 640. 641. 642. 643. 644. 645. 646. 647. 648. 649. 650. 651. 652. 653. 654. 655. 656. 657. 658. 659. 660. 661. 662. 663. 664. 665. 666. 667. 668. 669. 670. 671. 672. 673. 674. 675. 676. 677. 678. 679. 680. 681. 682. 683. 684. 685. 686. 687. 688. 689. 690. 691. 692. 693. 694. 695. 696. 697. 698. 699. 700. 701. 702. 703. 704. 705. 706. 707. 708. 709. 710. 711. 712. 713. 714. 715. 716. 717. 718. 719. 720. 721. 722. 723. 724. 725. 726. 727. 728. 729. 730. 731. 732. 733. 734. 735. 736. 737. 738. 739. 740. 741. 742. 743. 744. 745. 746. 747. 748. 749. 750. 751. 752. 753. 754. 755. 756. 757. 758. 759. 760. 761. 762. 763. 764. 765. 766. 767. 768. 769. 770. 771. 772. 773. 774. 775. 776. 777. 778. 779. 780. 781. 782. 783. 784. 785. 786. 787. 788. 789. 790. 791. 792. 793. 794. 795. 796. 797. 798. 799. 800. 801. 802. 803. 804. 805. 806. 807. 808. 809. 810. 811. 812. 813. 814. 815. 816. 817. 818. 819. 820. 821. 822. 823. 824. 825. 826. 827. 828. 829. 830. 831. 832. 833. 834. 835. 836. 837. 838. 839. 840. 841. 842. 843. 844. 845. 846. 847. 848. 849. 850. 851. 852. 853. 854. 855. 856. 857. 858. 859. 860. 861. 862. 863. 864. 865. 866. 867. 868. 869. 870. 871. 872. 873. 874. 875. 876. 877. 878. 879. 880. 881. 882. 883. 884. 885. 886. 887. 888. 889. 890. 891. 892. 893. 894. 895. 896. 897. 898. 899. 900. 901. 902. 903. 904. 905. 906. 907. 908. 909. 910. 911. 912. 913. 914. 915. 916. 917. 918. 919. 920. 921. 922. 923. 924. 925. 926. 927. 928. 929. 930. 931. 932. 933. 934. 935. 936. 937. 938. 939. 940. 941. 942. 943. 944. 945. 946. 947. 948. 949. 950. 951. 952. 953. 954. 955. 956. 957. 958. 959. 960. 961. 962. 963. 964. 965. 966. 967. 968. 969. 970. 971. 972. 973. 974. 975. 976. 977. 978. 979. 980. 981. 982. 983. 984. 985. 986. 987. 988. 989. 990. 991. 992. 993. 994. 995. 996. 997. 998. 999. 1000.

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“ness of wisdom,” “the meekness and fear
“with which we should be always ready to give
“a reason of the hope that is in us.”

If wisdom, in all these respects, and many others that might be mentioned, is both difficult and necessary, we have one promise, my dear brother, to encourage us, and which we may daily plead, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally to all men, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.”

3dly and lastly, “Study to shew yourself approved unto God” as a minister, in respect of faithfulness. By your office, as a minister and a pastor, you are constituted a steward in the house or family of God, or, which is the same thing, in the church of Christ, and that which is committed to your custody or keeping, as such, is the holy word of God, “the word of truth,” which contains “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” the food you are daily to bring forth to, and set before the children of the family: to this purpose the apostle says, “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful;” be faithful, therefore, my dear brother, to your lord and master, by keeping that which is committed to your trust, which is nothing else, nothing less than what the apostle tells us “was committed to his,” “the glorious gospel of the blessed God.” Remember, brother, this gospel is now, in a solemn manner, committed to your

^d James iii. 13.

^e 1 Pet. iii. 15.

^f James i. 5.

^g Eph. i. 13.

^h Matt. xiii. 11.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iv. 1, 2.

^k 1 Tim. i. 11.

keeping, with the same affectionate charge which the apostle gave to Timothy, "Keep that which is committed to thy trust¹." It is committed to you as a sacred depositum, which you are to keep, and give an account of to our lord and master, whose gospel it is; and the best, yea, the only way in which this can be done, to any saving purpose, the same apostle tells us, "That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us^m;" keep it with faith and love in your heart, as that which has brought life and salvation to your own soul, and like one that has been taught it by the Holy Spirit. This is to have it actually in possession, without which, how is it possible one can keep it in a due manner, and to any saving purpose! It is both a sure and a sweet way of holding "the truth as it is in Jesusⁿ," when it is "ingrafted^o" on the heart by "the spirit of faith^p," "and dwells richly there in all wisdom and spiritual understanding^q." They who have no surer hold of the truth than as it is matter of their opinion, even though probability and reason should be the ground of that opinion, will easily be induced, when a proper temptation offers, to let it go, and, as the apostle speaks, will, "concerning faith and a good conscience, make shipwreck^r." Awful instances of this have not been wanting in any age of the church, which we should all remember with reverence and godly fear.

Therefore, my dear brother, suffer me, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose servants

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 20.

^m 2 Tim. i. 14.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 21.

^o James i. 21.

^p 2 Cor. iv. 13.

^q Col. i. 16.

^r 1 Tim. i. 19.

we are, to beseech and intreat you to be faithful to your master, by holding fast the truth, "as you have been taught it," as I trust you have received it into your heart by a living faith, and as you have confessed it this day with your mouth, before many witnesses. Stand by, and defend it also to the utmost of your power, in a holy regular manner. Beware you neither act the part of a coward, deserting the truth when it is in danger of being called in question, and run down by adversaries, nor yet the part of a traitor, by basely giving it up, and tamely yielding it to its enemies; hold it fast to the end of your life, and remember the words of our Lord to the angel of the church of Smyrna; "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Be faithful also to the souls of men in all your ministrations, especially those who are immediately your charge, and committed to your care. Remember that solemn exhortation which the apostle gave to the elders of the church at Ephesus, and consider it as spoken to yourself in particular, "Take heed to yourself, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you an overseer, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Be faithful to them, so that you may be able to say, on all occasions, with the same apostle, "I take you to record that I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." Seek not to conceal any part of the truth of God's holy word; for that may

* Titus i. 9.
 Ver. 26, 27.

† Rev. ii. 10.

‡ Acts xx. 28.

fitly be compared to a servant's purloining his master's goods. Truth will always bear the light, and therefore should be brought forth on all proper occasions. Beware, therefore, my dear brother, of accommodating the truths of the gospel, either to your own ease and worldly advantage, or to the opinions, inclinations or humours of men, but deliver them, as they occur in the course of your ministry, with all that plainness, simplicity, faithfulness, and honest freedom, that the word of God directs to, and makes your indispensable duty. This is a piece of faithfulness that will yield you peace, even though it should raise up adversaries to you: If it does, fear not the face of man, your master will stand by, and support you, while you stand by, and faithfully declare his truth. This, and this only, is the food you are to set before the souls committed to your care and oversight, "the word of truth". See then that what you deliver in public preaching, from time to time, be what you take, and firmly believe to be agreeable to "the word of truth," and concerning which you can, with freedom and boldness of speech say, "Thus saith the Lord." This will add force and weight to what you say, and set it home with power on the minds of them that hear you. The more you do this, the more it will induce you to speak with all plainness of speech, so that you may be understood by the meanest and most illiterate of your hearers; and this may be done without affecting a low, vulgar, and coarse way of speaking, which disgraces the truth. The more a minister's style in preaching comes to that of the holy scriptures, and may be called "words which the Holy

"Ghost teacheth^x," "sound speech, that cannot be condemned^y," the more powerful and efficacious his preaching certainly will be. There is something in the phraseology of the Holy Ghost in the scriptures, that is in a peculiar manner suited to public preaching, and to render a man's ministrations savoury to the children of God. Concerning the style of the scriptures, with respect to preaching, it may be truly said, as David said of Goliath's sword, "there is none like it^z;" while what the apostle calls, "excellency of speech," and "enticing words of man's wisdom," a manner of preaching that happens to be in vogue in our day, makes even what of truth is expressed in that way to evaporate and come to nothing.

There is a way of preaching that the apostle Paul sets before us, that, alas! we in this generation are in a great measure strangers to, "preaching in demonstration of the spirit and of power^a." What that implies is better felt, both by ministers themselves, and their hearers, than described in words. I own this way of speaking is not in any man's own power, but it has been, and may be obtained by faith in prayer. "Prayer," as good bishop Leighton happily expresses it, "is the better half of a minister's whole work, and that which makes the other half lively and effectual." We should not, my brother, think we have done all our duty, when we have spent ourselves in study and preaching, earnest wrestling with God in prayer should accompany all our labours, that

^x 1 Cor. ii. 13.

^y Titus ii. 8.

^z 1 Sam. xxi. 9.

^a 1 Cor. ii. 4.

they may be successful, "travailing in birth," as the apostle expresses it, "till Christ is "formed in souls^b." Alas! the restraint of the spirit, in this respect, is at the root, and is one main cause of the fruitless preaching and hearing, that is but too common in the day in which we live. If we were instant and fervent in prayer for this blessing so as to obtain it, it would speedily change the face of affairs in our congregations, and turn our barren wilderness into a fruitful field. May the Lord soon send such a change, if it be his holy will! Though I have encroached too much already on your time and patience, and that of the audience, yet I cannot think of closing this address, without saying a few things for your encouragement.

1. Then, my dear brother, the work you have undertaken is awful, important and difficult, but withal it is honourable; it is, when duly considered, the most honourable work the sons of men can possibly be engaged in. To be employed in winning souls to Jesus Christ, is near a-kin to his work of saving souls; and what greater honour can possibly be put upon us! With respect to this, I may allude to what the angel said concerning John the baptist, "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord," and that is true greatness indeed! There is a two-fold reason given of this greatness, which deserves particular notice, "for he shall be filled "with the Holy Ghost, and many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their "God^a. The honour attending this work was great, even to admiration, in the eyes of the apostle Paul, "And I thank (says he) Jesus "Christ our Lord, who hath enabled me, for

^b Gal. iv. 19. ^a Luke i. 15, 16.

“ that he counted me faithful, putting me into
 “ the ministry^b. ” “ Unto me who am less than
 “ the least of all saints is this grace given, that
 “ I should preach among the Gentiles the un-
 “ searchable riches of Christ^c. ”

2. Remember you are not alone in your work, and if you keep close to your master, and to the instructions he has given you in his word, he will own, support, and strengthen you; for he sends none of his servants “ a warfare on their own charges^d. ” Remember and believe daily that gracious promise he has left on record to his faithful servants, “ Lo ! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world^e. ” If at any time you feel your own weakness, remember and believe what he has said, “ My grace is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness^f. ” The belief of this will enable you to say, with that blessed apostle, to whom this was first spoken, “ most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me^g. ”

3. Glorious and great beyond thought or expression is the gracious and free reward which our dear Lord and Master has provided for and promised to all his faithful servants. We may indeed meet with considerable hardships and difficulties in his service, with opposition and bad treatment from men to whom we are sent with his message and word of reconciliation, but this is no more than he himself met with, in our world, when he exercised a personal ministry in it, and he has forewarned us, that we must expect the same treatment ; “ for the servant

^b 1 Tim. i. 12. ^c Eph. iii. 8. ^d 1 Corinth. ix. 7.
^e Mat. xxviii. 20. ^f 2 Corinth. xii. 9. ^g Ibid.

“is not greater than his lord^h.” If then we “endure hardship, as good soldiers of Jesus Christⁱ,” and faint not, that sentence from his mouth, at the end of the day, when he calls us off the field of battle, will make an ample and super-abundant amends for all, “Well done good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your lord^k.” The joy which this will communicate, will last throughout eternal ages. I conclude with those weighty and comfortable words of the apostle, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock; and when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away^l.”

Blessed are all they who shall receive that crown from his holy and liberal hand.

^h John xiii. 16. ⁱ 2 Tim. ii. 3. ^k Mat. xxv. 21.

^l 1 Pet. v. 1—5.

S E R M O N

THOMAS TOWLE, B.D.

PHILIPPIANS I. 3-11

AND THIS I PRAY, THAT YOUR LOVE MAY
ABOUND YET MORE AND MORE IN KNOW-
LEDGE AND IN ALL JUDGMENT, THAT YE
MAY APPROVE THINGS THAT ARE EXCEL-
LENT, THAT YE MAY BE SINCERE AND
WITHOUT OFFENCE TILL THE DAY OF
CHRIST, BEING FILLED WITH THE FRUITS
OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH ARE BY JESUS
CHRIST, UNTO THE GLORY AND PRAISE OF
GOD.

THE words before us are a comprehensive
and noble prayer of the apostle Paul, for
the church of Christ at Philippi, and they pre-
sent to our view a number of blessings equally
needed by, and which should with the same ear-
nestness, be requested for every other Christian so-
ciety; the fulfils of this passage, therefore,
to the important points on which we are now
assembled in the house of God, cannot I pre-
sume be questioned by any. May God enable
me to discourse on this peculiarly excellent
prayer.

T H E

S E R M O N

B Y

THOMAS TOWLE, B.D.

PHILIPPIANS i. 9.—II.

AND THIS I PRAY, THAT YOUR LOVE MAY
 ABOUND YET MORE AND MORE, IN KNOW-
 LEDGE AND IN ALL JUDGMENT; THAT YE
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 prayer,

prayer, with some degree of the same spirit, with which it was express'd by the great apostle! May he rightly dispose you to hear what shall be now said concerning it, as far as it is agreeable to his word! And, may he so bless the hints which shall be given, that all present, and especially those who have the most immediate concern in the solemnities of this day, may have great reason for joy and thankfulness!—In enlarging on the text, I shall

I. Consider the valuable blessings mentioned in it.

II. Represent to you, what the apostle requested with respect to these blessings.—And then,

III. Show you what is intimated by the apostle's application to God for this.

I. I shall consider the valuable blessings mentioned in the text.—And these may, I apprehend, be regarded as the three following: an acquaintance with spiritual and heavenly objects; correspondent impressions from them; and the visible practical influence of them.—These, it must be allowed by all who have any knowledge of their real nature, are blessings of vast extent, it cannot, therefore, be supposed, that in a single discourse I shall represent them as copiously and minutely as they deserve; I hope, therefore, you will be satisfied with but a brief and general account of them, an account, which I would have you consider as little more than furnishing you with hints to be carried from hence, that they may be enlarged on in your private meditations.—The first blessing respecting spiritual and heavenly objects, mentioned in the text,

text, is, an acquaintance with them.—One word by which the apostle represents this blessing is “knowledge,” by which, as distinguish’d from “judgment,” the next word he uses with the same view, and the meaning of which will be presently laid before you, we are, I apprehend, to understand a speculative apprehension of divine things, just and right ideas concerning them, such ideas as agree with the representation made of them in the word of God. Without a speculative apprehension of them, it is impossible there should be an acquaintance with any objects, whether relating to this world or the other, to time or eternity; accordingly, it is this, I conceive, we are to consider as intended by the word “knowledge” in the text.—The next word the apostle makes use of in describing the blessing I am now speaking of, is “judgment.”—If you look into the margent of the bible, you will see that the original word here made use^m of, is render’d “sense,” or sensation, and it appears to me to be thus render’d with great propriety. By this, I apprehend, we are to understand what is commonly and justly call’d an experimental knowledge of divine things, such a view of them as is the result of a sensation of their truth and excellence, by an experience of their reality, certainty, and efficacy upon ourselves. Though an acquaintance with religious truths, in a speculative way, ought not to be slighted, much less despised, but should be esteem’d and desir’d, this experimental knowledge of them is most to be valued, and should accordingly, with peculiar earnestness, be sought by us: we should especially wish and strive to

^m *Αἰσθήσις.*

“taste that the Lord is gracious^a.” But in representing the blessing we are now attending to, the apostle not only speaks of “knowledge” and “judgment” or “sense,” but also describes it as leading the happy persons who are the possessors of it, to “approve things that are excellent.” The Greek phrase here used^b, it is necessary to suggest, will admit of two versions: it may be rendered, “approve the things that are excellent,” or, as in the margin, “try the things that differ;” it may, therefore, properly be viewed in both these lights.—Thus taken, then, the acquaintance with spiritual and heavenly objects, which the apostle mentions in the passage we are considering, is such as leads those who have it, to prove the things which present themselves to them, to discern the difference which there is between them, and to embrace those which are true and excellent, with a sincere and ardent approbation, bearing some proportion to that degree of certainty and excellence which is discern’d in them. This is the first blessing which the apostle mentions in the text, an acquaintance with spiritual and heavenly objects.—And justly, permit me to remark as I pass on, might the inspir’d penman of my text place this the first of the blessings enumerated by him, this being, without doubt, a principal blessing, a blessing which lies at the foundation of, and has a commanding influence over the other blessings here mentioned.

The second blessing, respecting spiritual and heavenly objects, mentioned in the text, is correspondent impressions from them. The word “love” in this passage may be con-

^a 1 Pet. ii. 3. ^b Εἰς τὸ δικάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα.

sider'd either in a large and general, or in a limited and particular sense; accordingly, I shall give you an hint or two, as to the import of this word in both these lights. —

The word “Love,” in the text, may, I say, be taken largely and generally. Love is, you know, one of the most commanding passions or affections of the human heart, by this word, therefore, all those passions or affections may be intended; and taken in this light, what the apostle means here, is a proper impression from known truths on all these noble springs of action; an exercise of fear, hope, sorrow, joy, and the like powerful emotions of mind, varying according to the different nature of those truths. — Truth may be apprehended, and yet those who apprehend it not be duly affected with it; daily observation gives undoubted attestation to this; and, on the contrary, men may be affected, strongly affected, and yet not by truth; daily observation certainly bears witness to this also: but the blessing now before us, taken in the large sense in which the word used to describe it, is at present considered, means such an exercise of the passions and affections as is raised and supported by “knowledge” and “judgment,” or “sense,” by a just experimental acquaintance with objects of a spiritual and heavenly nature. The man who is honoured with this blessing, sees and feels the truth and excellence of these objects, and, so is, in some degree, duly impressed with them. Happy he who is the possessor of this duly affecting knowledge! But the word “Love,” in the text, may be viewed in a limited and particular sense, a sense which, being comprehended in, is not so extensive as that view of it

which has just been mentioned, in other words, as restrained to that particular passion of the human heart, which is usually called by this name. And, understood in this way, the word "Love" here, means a sincere esteem and affection for the infinitely great and ever blessed God, as he has made himself known, especially in the gospel, and for every thing or person bearing his image. — And I must observe here also, as I did on considering the former blessing, that, in which soever of these lights we view the word "Love" in the text, it must be owned, the apostle very properly places this blessing immediately after that which he had just mentioned, this being the natural, the necessary consequent of that. — Wherever there is "knowledge," and "judgment," or "sense," a just experimental acquaintance with heavenly and divine realities, there will be, there cannot but be, some degree of correspondent impressions from them, particularly a sincere and cordial esteem of them. But will this exercise of the passions and affections in general, will this genuine and hearty esteem in particular, be inward only? Certainly not. Whenever these things exist within, they will, they must, in some way or other, appear outwardly; as their sacred workings are felt in the heart, some discoveries of their existence and efficacy will, undoubtedly will, be seen in the life.

And this leads me to the third and last blessing, respecting spiritual and heavenly objects spoken of in the text, and that is the visible practical influence of them; this the apostle expresses by "being sincere, and without offence, until the day of Christ," and by "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." — This part of
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the text contains a peculiarly comprehensive and noble description of that Christian obedience, which will, in some degree, be the effect of Christian knowledge and love in every person who is so happy as to be the subject of them; accordingly, I shall give you a few hints as to each branch of this representation.—And the apostle mentions the ground, nature, and tendency of this obedience, with an important circumstance respecting the whole of that valuable blessing; I shall therefore suggest a thought or two as to each of these particulars.

The first particular mentioned in this apostolic description of Christian obedience, is the ground of that obedience; this the apostle sets before us, when he mentions “being sincere.” The Greek word here rendered “sincere^a,” carries with it, as has been often remarked, an allusion to things which will bear to be tried by being held up to the light, to the very light of the sun itself, and that when he shines even in the glory of his meridian splendor.—Accordingly by this I apprehend, we are to understand integrity and uprightness, in opposition to deceit and hypocrisy, such integrity and uprightness as will undergo the most accurate examination and trial. The heart being, in consequence of the renewing operations of the Holy Spirit, in possession of spiritual knowledge and evangelical love, these noble principles take off the man who is honoured with them from habitually aiming at ends base and unworthy, and influence him to desire and endeavour habitually to maintain a single eye to the glory of God in all his actions. So fundamental is this to Christian

^a Εὐθύμενος.

obedience, that all claims to such obedience, where this is wanting, are vain boastings, and dangerous delusions.

The next thing the apostle mentions in the text as to Christian obedience, is its nature; and this he represents both in a negative and positive view; the former he speaks of as “being without offence,” and the latter he calls “the fruits of righteousness.”—First, the apostle speaks of “being without offence;” by which, he appears to me to intend, standing at a distance from whatever may prove an occasion of “stumbling and falling,” as the original word here used ^b properly signifies, that is, may bring persons themselves, or others, into danger of sin and ruin.—Christian obedience includes a desire and endeavour to maintain a guard against every thing unlawful, whatever measures may be taken to terrify or allure into it, and, it also includes a continual circumspection, even with respect to such things as are in themselves lawful, lest the Christian himself, or any others, should be insnared and injured by means of these.—But the apostle, in the passage we are attending to, calls Christian obedience “the fruits of righteousness.” He calls it “Righteousness.” “Righteousness is, you are without doubt sensible, conformity to a law; accordingly, when the apostle calls Christian obedience by that name, it appears to me his design to insinuate that this obedience in general consists in a conformity to the divine law. The law of God, I mean the moral law, is still in force, and ever will be, not indeed as a covenant of works, or a constitution by virtue of their own obedience

^b ΑΠΡΟΣΚΟΠΟΣ

to which any of the descendents of apostate Adam can obtain life, but as a sacred and infallible rule of duty. As such the Christian considers it, desires and endeavours to have an encreasing conformity to its excellent requirements, laments every instance of deviation from them in others, but especially in himself, and breaths after heaven, with constancy and ardour, because he is assured that there he and all God's people, shall be not merely perfectly happy, but also completely holy. But the apostle, in the passage before us, not only calls the obedience of Christians "Righteousness," but in describing it, speaks of "the fruits of righteousness."—It is, you know, not uncommon in scripture for really religious and holy persons to be represented as "trees;" agreeably to this figure, therefore, the good works performed by them are, in the inspired volume, called "fruits." By this expression then, "fruits of righteousness," we are to understand, the several particulars of Christian obedience, in the whole of their vast and beautiful variety. These, whether they have respect to God, Christians themselves, or others, may justly be compared to rich and high flavoured fruits, because, like them, they are very various; brought forth in their respective seasons; some in the spring and summer of prosperity, others in the autumn and winter of adversity; grow on that only root of Christian obedience, an heart quickened by divine grace; are produced, by the blessing of God, on the use of appointed means; and contribute to the ornament, pleasure, and usefulness of the man who performs them.

To this concise but comprehensive account of Christian obedience, with respect to its nature, the apostle annexes an equally brief and expressive representation of its tendency likewise, "which are" (says he, speaking as to "the fruits of righteousness") "by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."—One thing asserted in this part of the text is, that Christian obedience, or good works, "are to the glory and praise of God."—The words "glory" and "praise," may, I apprehend, be considered as suggesting distinct ideas. By "glory" we may understand the divine excellencies and perfections themselves, and by "praise", the ascription of these excellencies and perfections to God, either by the man with whom Christian obedience is found, or by such as "behold his good conversation". And indeed! the good works of believers are admirably calculated, in ways which your time at present, will not permit me even so much as to mention to "shew forth the ["virtues^d and] "praises of him who hath called them out of "darkness into his marvellous light," to display what God is to the view of men, and so to induce them to "glorify him, the Christian's Father in heaven". But is it said in the text, that good works are "to the glory and praise of God?" it is also asserted, that they are so "by Jesus Christ." And with the greatest propriety may this be said, as the whole of Christian obedience is performed with a view to the authority of Christ; is conducted by virtue of strength, derived from him; and is accepted,

^c 1 Pet. iii. 16.

^d Ἀρεταί.

^e 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^f Matt. v. 16.

not from any merit in the obedience itself, or excellency in the person by whom it is performed, but wholly for the sake of the great Mediator, on account of his obedience, sufferings and death.—And has the Christian's obedience this noble tendency? every true Christian, in some degree, directs his obedience to this great end: he performs good works, not that he may be seen by men, not that he may merit any thing from God, but “that God, in all things, may “be glorified, “thro’ Jesus Christ.” Sensible that the divine glory was the chief end of his creation, preservation, election, redemption, and effectual calling, he wishes and strives to advance this in every thought, word and action. Thus the apostle represents the tendency of Christian obedience. But this is not all, for to this he adds the mention of an important circumstance respecting the whole of that valuable blessing; he speaks of it as having a reference “to the day of Jesus Christ.” Indeed, this expression, “the day of Jesus Christ,” seems to stand connected with but two articles of the Christian's obedience mentioned in the text, but, I apprehend, it is to be regarded as having a connection with the whole of that obedience, as referring not merely to his “being sincere, and “without offence,” but also to his bringing forth “those fruits of righteousness, which are by “Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” By “the day of Christ” here, some distinguished and peculiarly important period is, without doubt, intended; and what period can that be, but the day which is often called by this name in scripture, the day when the Lord Jesus shall

2 1 Pet. iv. 11.

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appear

appear under the august character of universal Judge, to the utter confusion of his implacable enemies, and the complete salvation of his faithful friends? And very justly may Christian obedience be represented as having to do with that day, since it includes "a patient continuance in well doing^b," supported by the animating hope of "that grace which shall be manifested at the revelation of Jesus Christ^c". But so much must suffice, as to the last blessing respecting spiritual and heavenly objects, which is mentioned in the text, the visible practical influence of them. And, with the greatest justice, might the apostle add this to the blessings before spoken of, since, wherever they are, this certainly, in some degree or other, will be likewise: spiritual knowledge, and evangelical affection, ever will lead to, ever will issue in, Christian obedience.—Thus I have considered the valuable blessings enumerated in the text, and so have attended to the first general head; I now, therefore, proceed to the next, that is,

II. To represent what is requested in the passage with respect to these blessings, and that is, that the Christians at Philippi might be favoured with an eminent increase of them. This must be evident, at first sight, even to the most cursory reader of the text; the inspired penman of it "prays, that their love might ABOUND YET MORE AND MORE in knowledge, and in all judgment, and that they might be FILLED with the fruits of righteousness." Now this manifestly supposes, that the persons to whom these words relate, at least most of them, were,

^b Rom. ii. 7.

^c 1 Pet. i. 13.

in some degree, partakers of the important blessings I have just been considering. You will be pleased to recollect what was mentioned at the beginning of this discourse, that the words before us were directed to a church of Christ. The members of such a sacred society all certainly profess themselves Christians; this the name they bear undoubtedly implies. Accordingly the apostle intimates his apprehensions, that they, the greater part of them at least, were what they professed to be, and, as such, partakers of that spiritual knowledge, evangelical affection, and Christian obedience, which are mentioned in the text, and without which men cannot be, in whatever light they are considered, either by themselves or others, real Christians, or enjoy the inestimable privileges peculiar to all of this noble character. Having this view of them, the apostle describes them as true Christians, in some verses before the text: thus he declares, that "he thank'd God, on every remembrance of "them, for their fellowship in the gospel^k," or (as I apprehend that expression is to be understood) for their joint participation of gospel blessings; to the same purpose he lets them know, "that "God had begun a good work in them^l;" and in like manner he assures them, that "he had "them in his heart," that he entertained a most sincere and affectionate regard for them, "inasmuch as they were partakers of his grace," or as it is in the margin, "partakers with him "of grace^m," shared in the same valuable effects of God's sovereign favour with himself.--- And indeed, it should be the chief concern of those who have places in Christian churches,

^k Ver. 3, 5.^l Ver. 6.^m Ver. 9.

whether they be in office, or only private members in those churches, to have a well-founded persuasion, that they are Christians, not merely in name and profession, "but in deed and in truth"; that they see the glory, feel the power, and display the influence of the gospel of Christ.—It is possible for persons to esteem and call themselves Christians, to be esteemed and called so by others, and as such to be admitted into Christian churches, yea, to be raised to stations of honour and importance in them, and, as a consequence of this, to make a considerable figure, and have extensive influence, among the professors of religion, and yet to be destitute of these blessings: Judas, that unhappy man! who betrayed his Lord, and murdered himself, stands recorded in sacred history, a striking evidence of this awful truth.—Now, if this be the situation of any at the hour of death, and in the day of Judgment, they must, notwithstanding their profession and privileges, perish, irrecoverably perish. As surely as the word of the infinitely great and eternally blessed God himself is true, so sure it is that, unless a man has some degree of that inestimable knowledge which duly affects the heart, and rightly influences the life of him who has it; there is, there will be, no salvation to him: "He that believeth not, shall be damned." And how truly deplorable will be the condition of all such! deplorable indeed! to perish, notwithstanding their profession, privileges, and hopes! It should, then, certainly it should, be the principal concern of every one in a church of Christ, to have good reason for concluding, that

he is not only considered as a Christian by himself and others, but that he is so in the view of that infinitely great and excellent being, who certainly judges of things and persons just as they are.—In order to this, professors of Christianity should be much employed in hearing, reading, and thinking over the word of God, in which the views, dispositions, and behaviour of real Christians are clearly represented; they should be very frequent, careful, and impartial, in the great duty of self-examination, that so they may see whether the distinguishing marks of true Christians are found with themselves, in their own hearts, and on their own lives; especially should they “continue instant in prayer,” for the presence of the blessed spirit of God, who graciously condescends to “bear witness with the spirits of believers, that they are God’s children,” and, without whose sacred influence, all the evidences of their being Christians in their temper and conduct, will be of no more use to shew them their real state towards God, than (that I may mention a simile often made use of by some of our old divines, to illustrate this) the figures on a sun-dial will be serviceable for ascertaining the time of the day, when the beams of the sun are withdrawn from them. But is it supposed in the part of the text now before us, that the persons to whom it was directed, were, at least most of them, partakers of the noble blessings enumerated in it? it is farther taken for granted, that they did not possess these blessings in the highest degree: the very mention of an increase of knowledge, love, and obedience, even to every reader, supposes

† Rom. xii. 12.

† Rom. viii. 16.

this. And what is thus supposed in the text, is as plainly intimated in the verses before it: thus when the apostle speaks of his "being confident that he who had begun a good work in them would perform it,"^s surely this implies that that good work had not yet reached the promised perfection. Now, what the apostle supposes in this respect, as to the Christians at Philippi, is certainly true, as to all other Christians: whatever be their advances in the spiritual and divine life, every one of this character may without doubt say, as the apostle Paul himself we know did, "I have not yet attained, neither am I as yet perfect."^t Indeed, if any think or say otherwise, it is a sad sign that they are greatly unacquainted with the word of God, and themselves; yea, their very thinking and saying that they are perfect, is itself an indubitable evidence of their imperfection: "If (says the holy, the inspir'd Job) I say, I am perfect, mine own mouth shall prove me perverse,"^u the very declaration would evince its falshood. And is it so? Are even the most distinguished Christians at present imperfect? Then, surely, we who have reason to hope that we are Christians, should pray and strive to maintain a sense of this our imperfection strong and lively upon our Hearts. This will check that pride which is too prone to rise within us; this will promote our thankfulness for the gospel-method of pardon and cleansing, and excite us to a continual use of it, leading us every day and every hour to apply to the Lord Jesus Christ, that exalted redeemer, for these truly great, these absolutely necessary blessings; and this will also raise our thoughts to,

^s Ver. 6.^t Philip. iii. 12.^u Job ix. 20.

and inflame our desires after that blessed state, where (to use the apostle Paul's expressive language) "that which is perfect shall come, and "that which is in part shall be done away". The inspir'd penman of the passage I am considering, having thus intimated, that the persons he address'd, though partakers of the blessings enumerated in it, did not enjoy them in the highest degree, requests that they might be favoured with a great increase of them: that they might know more of spiritual and heavenly objects; that they might be more deeply impress'd with them; and that, in the whole of their conversation and behaviour, they might wear more of a visible influence from them: so making a progress in every thing excellent and commendable, till they arrived at Heaven, that state of uninterrupted and everlasting perfection. Accordingly, in that foregoing verse of this chapter which has been mentioned already*, he expresses his desire that they might, yea, his persuasion, that they would gradually improve in light, love and holiness, till through the riches of God's grace towards them, they became, as the apostle Paul speaks, "perfect men".—Now, this which was requested for the Christians at Philippi, all Christians should, and if they are disposed and act like Christians, certainly will be solicitous to have, themselves. One of this character will say, with the penman of the text, in another part of this epistle, "I count not myself to have apprehended," to have reached that perfection of grace which I am warranted to expect, "but this one thing I do, forgetting "those things which are behind", not being satisf-

* 1 Corinth. xiii. 10. x Ver. 6, y Eph. iv. 13.

fied with present attainments, "and reaching forth
 "unto those things which are before" aiming, in-
 tensely aiming at further and nobler improve-
 ments, "I press towards the mark, for the prize
 "of the high-calling of God, in Christ Jesus?"
 —And, indeed, well may Christians be solicitous
 to receive a large increase of the noble blessings
 mentioned in the text, since such an increase is
 itself a blessing of very great importance. If
 spiritual knowledge, evangelical love, and
 Christian obedience, be in themselves blessings,
 (as every really religious person will acknow-
 ledge they are) it necessarily follows, that an
 increase of them, must be a blessing, and a large
 increase of them a very great blessing.—And
 that it is so, many other considerations certainly
 evince.—To this there are many pressing exhor-
 tations in scripture, "Grow," (says the apostle
 Peter, in words, which though first directed to
 the persons to whom that apostle wrote, are to
 be considered as address'd to Christians in every
 age) "in grace, and in the knowledge of our
 "Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ:"—Numerous
 are the promises of this blessing which are made
 in the same incomparably excellent, and valu-
 able book, "Even" (says the prophet) "the
 "youths shall faint and be weary, and the young
 "men shall utterly fall: but they that wait
 "upon the Lord shall renew their strength;
 "they shall mount up with wings as eagles;
 "they shall run and not be weary, and they shall
 "walk and not faint": And the consequences
 of a great increase in knowledge, love, and ho-
 linefs, are peculiarly valuable and important.
 Thereby God is greatly glorified, "Herein"

² Chap. iii. 13. ³ 1 Pet. iii. 18. ⁴ Isaiah xl. 30, 31.

(said

(said our blessed Lord to his disciples, and the same he may be regarded as saying to all his followers) "is my father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." This increase is much to the advantage of the happy persons with whom it is found; considerable degrees of knowledge, love and holiness are in themselves pleasing, especially, as they give strong evidence of personal interest in the special love of God himself. And to this may be added, that the increase I am speaking of will be greatly beneficial to others also; hereby Christians will be furnished with greater inclination and ability to do good to others, and others will be engaged, by the blessing of God, to copy after their amiable example.—For these reasons, then, not to mention some others, which might easily be introduced, should Christians be constantly solicitous, that the noble blessings enumerated in the text, may not only (to use an apostolic expression) "be in them, but abound also." In a diligent use, therefore, of the means of grace, with a continual dependence on that sovereign influence which is absolutely necessary to render those means successful, and which may be warrantably expected in the assiduous use of them, "Let us," my Christian friends, "go on to perfection."

Thus then I have considered what is requested in the passage we are attending to, as to the blessings enumerated in it, that the Christians at Philippi might be favoured with an eminent increase of them; and this was the second branch of the subject: all that now remains is,

^c John xv. 8. ^d 2 Pet. i. 8. ^e Heb. vi. 1.

III. And lastly, To shew you what is intimated by the apostle's application to God for this. Now, without doubt, this implies that the noble blessing here requested could only be received from God himself.—And indeed, this is a certain and important truth. “Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the father of lights^f;” and if so, surely the peculiarly excellent and valuable blessing I now speak of, must be derived from the same fountain. To the divine influence are spiritual knowledge, love, and obedience, when the Christian is first made a partaker of these inestimable blessings, certainly owing, and to the same kind and powerful influence are the continuance and improvement of the same blessings, as certainly to be ascribed also: to this all the scriptures give witness.—There we find Christians represented as expecting this blessing from God only, and giving him the glory of it, whenever they received it; yea, there we find that divine influence used as an argument (and a powerful argument it certainly is!) with Christians, to labour after continual improvements in light, love, holiness, and comfort. “Work out” (says the apostle Paul, addressing some of this character) “your own salvation, with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure^g.” So true is it that the doctrine of sovereign and efficacious grace leads not to inactivity and licentiousness, but to diligence and holiness.—But does the apostle's application to Heaven for an abundant increase

^f James i. 17. ^g Phil. ii. 12, 13.

of knowledge, love and holiness imply, that this great blessing could only be received from God himself, it intimates something farther, and that is, that prayer is a principal means of obtaining this blessing: and, indeed, so it is. Prayer is the appointed way of deriving every blessing from God, and so this among the rest.—It is incumbent on sinners to ask of God the spiritual and saving blessings of which they are destitute; surely I may well assert this, when we are assured an apostle himself directed one of this character, not only to “repent,” but also to “pray for forgiveness,” even at the very instant in which he told him, that “he perceived he was in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity,” or, as these figurative expressions mean, that notwithstanding all his profession and privileges, he still remained in the impurity, slavery and misery of an unconverted state.^b Now, if it is the duty of sinners to seek from God the spiritual and saving blessings they have not, certainly no one can doubt whether it be required of saints to apply to Heaven for the continuance and increase of the blessings they have.—And, indeed, the word of God universally leads us to this sentiment. There we may observe Christians repeatedly ordered to seek this blessing at the divine footstool. “Ye beloved” (says the apostle Jude, addressing persons of this noble character) “building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal lifeⁱ :” a passage

^b Acts viii. 20—23. ⁱ Jude, ver. 20, 21.

in which Christians are manifestly directed to prayer as one way in which they are to expect edification in love, holiness, and comfort, on the sacred evangelical principles they had received. —In order to awaken and support an unwearied observance of these commands, we find promises of this blessing made to those who humbly ask it at the throne of grace : thus, when God had promised grace to his people to pardon, sanctify, and comfort them, he, at the same time, let them know the absolute necessity of perseverance in prayer, to their warrantable hope of these blessings ; “ yet for this,” says he, “ will I be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them^k,” I will, as if he had said, bestow these favours, but I will be honour’d by a believing application to me for them. Animated by this, and other endearing assurances, the most eminent Christians, whose disposition and conduct are recorded in the scripture, are represented as seeking, earnestly seeking spiritual improvement at the throne of grace. “ We ” (says the apostle Paul, setting forth his own behaviour, with that of his believing brethren, in the instance at present before us) “ do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his [God’s] will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding : that ye might walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God ; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness^l.” Ac-

^k Ezek. 36, 37. ^l Col. i. 9—11.

cordingly, it is very observable, that God has usually bestowed the blessing I am speaking of in the way of prayer: the most praying generally have been, and still are, the most understanding, affectionate, and fruitful Christians.---How constant and fervent then should all Christians be in the performance of this great duty, that so, to the Divine Glory, their own advantage, and the benefit of others, they may be eminent for knowledge, love and holiness!

Thus I have shewn you what is intimated by the apostle's application to God, that the Christians at Philippi might have an abundant increase of the noble blessings enumerated in the text: and so I have gone over the three things I proposed to consider from the words; all now remaining then, is to close the subject with a remark or two on what has been laid before you.——And

I. From what has been said we may form a judgment wherein consists the true prosperity of a church of Christ.—The apostle Paul well knew wherein the prosperity of such a society consisted, and he had a most ardent affection for that community to which the epistle where the text is, was directed; from hence then we may reasonably conclude, that he asked for those blessings which would be best for that sacred body. And, indeed, the manner in which he express'd his desire of the favour he requested, appears to me strongly to imply, that the blessings he asked was, in his apprehension, of the last importance: "This I pray," says he, q. d. this I entreat in the first place, and whatever I am deny'd, which I request for you,

you, it is my earnest intreaty I may not be deny'd this.—From this prayer, then, we may collect wherein lies the real prosperity of a church of Christ; that then is a society of this kind truly prosperous, when it is in the possession of the valuable blessings requested in the text.—Many, indeed, think, that the prosperity of a church of Christ consists in the number of its members, or in the affluence and splendor of their circumstances in life; but then is a Christian church truly prosperous, when those who are in office in it, and its respective members are furnished with an abundance of that experimental acquaintance with objects of a spiritual and heavenly nature, which duly impresses their hearts, and properly influences their lives.---May all the churches of Christ on earth visibly enjoy this prosperity !---But again,

IIIdly, From the hints which have been given in this discourse, it may be infer'd what is the best method to be taken, both by ministers and churches, towards the enjoyment of this prosperity.---Without doubt the apostle Paul not only desired the most valuable blessing for the church of Christ at Philippi, but also took the most direct way to obtain that blessing: and if so, we may reasonably conclude that prayer is a principal mean for the attainment of this great end.---Not, indeed, that this is the only step to be taken with a view to this: certainly not. It is incumbent on the pastors, the deacons, and all the private members of a Christian society, by an upright, diligent, and steady discharge of the several duties required of them in the sacred word, to endeavour to promote this prosperity;

nor

nor without a resolute, zealous perseverance in this, can the inestimable blessing I now speak of be warrantably expected : but still prayer is one of the chief means to be made use of, both by ministers and others, for this great purpose.---It should, then, be your frequent employment, my dear sir, who have now publicly taken the pastoral charge of this church, to pray for it : and should your pastor pray for you, you, the deacons and private members, of this Christian society, should likewise pray for him, and yourselves ; and let one main article, in your addresses to Heaven, be, that he and you may be eminently partakers of that noble blessing which the apostle requested in the text for the Christians in Philippi.---And may God hear those prayers, and grant true spiritual, evangelical prosperity, in a very great and striking degree !——But,

IIIIdly and lastly, From what has been represented, we may take occasion to rise in our thoughts to the heavenly state, and may form some just ideas both of the nature and excellency of it. Every church of Christ on earth, may be considered as a kind of representation of the church triumphant in Heaven, and the prosperity of the one as a sketch of the glory of the other : if then the prosperity of the former consists in knowledge, love, and holiness, we may safely conclude that the glory of the latter will consist in knowledge, love, and holiness also. ---But how greatly will the church in Heaven exceed even the best and most prosperous church on earth ! In Heaven all the saints shall be collected ; there their knowledge, love, holiness,
and

and joy shall be absolutely perfect ; and in that state the perfection of these sacred particulars shall be uninterrupted and everlasting.---To that world may we be all entitled ; for it may we be swiftly preparing ; in the believing view, and well-grounded expectations of it, may we live daily ; and there may we at length feel ourselves the possessors of an exceeding “ great “ and eternal weight of glory^m.” Amen ! and Amen !

^m 2 Corinth. iv. 17.



F I N I S.

THE PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE
WORK OF THE MINISTRY.

A

8.

S E R M O N,

Preached in *Broad-Mead*, BRISTOL,

BEFORE THE

Bristol Education Society,

AUGUST 12, 1778.

By JOHN ASH, LL.D.

Published at the Request of the SOCIETY.

*The same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able also to
teach others.*

PAUL.

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